

**Paul E. Guise**

**Group Dynamics and the Small Choir:  
an application of select models from behavioural and social psychology**

**Abstract**

Music has been a part of the human existence from time immemorial. In its various guises music has developed through both solo and group performances. Most musicians study to become solo performers but are then expected, without systematic group training, to perform well in ensembles. The implication is that the whole (the group) can be derived exclusively from the sum of its parts (the soloists). Only rarely does this approach to group music making work. Conversely, we encounter examples in music where the group is demonstrably “better” than its members taken individually. This “systems” approach, where the function of the group is recognised as independent of individual function, is common in other disciplines, and yet many musicians are not familiar with these extra-musical concepts. Voice students are commonly told they are “choral singers” or “solo singers”, as though these roles were mutually exclusive. However, through systematic application of theories found in Behavioural and Social Psychology (and commonly implemented in the business world through Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour programs), one can derive an understanding of those parameters which can allow performers to develop the competencies necessary for performing in a group. The group member must be skilled at group decision-making, cultivating interpersonal relationships, and balancing group conformity with the need for innovation and individual approaches. Social Psychology also provides us with insight into concepts of leadership and power, group performance, and rewards and status. The application of these concepts can have a great effect when making fundamental decisions about the small choir, such as type of leadership (sharing of leadership; single conductor; conducting from within the choir) and decision-making structures (dictatorial; distributed), which will greatly influence the dynamics of the musical group.




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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Department of Music for acceptance, the essay entitled "Group Dynamics and the Small Choir: an application of select models from behavioural and social psychology" submitted by Paul E. Guise in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Choral Conducting.

  
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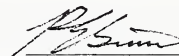
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## **Group Dynamics and the Small Choir: an application of select models from behavioural and social psychology**

In the literature written for choral directors, there seems to be a common approach taken by many writers regarding the qualities and skills which determine a conductor's effectiveness. Books centre on a gestural approach to musical direction, emphasising physical learning as well as independent score preparation and other individual skills. The belief that "superior musicianship is the prime quality of a conductor" (Demaree and Moses 1995, p.4) is commonly held, and indeed is a driving influence for the behaviour of many choral directors. In combining this view with a narrowly defined gestural approach to conducting, choral directors and educators deny (or ignore) the fact that choirs are in fact complex groups of individuals. It is my assertion that any approach which fails to consider group aspects of choral music making seriously is incomplete and is unlikely to result in long-term success for the ensemble. A sample of choral education literature in use should help to underline this point.

In the introduction to his book, *Rehearsal Guide for the Choral Director*, Jack Boyd states; "This book is based on those rehearsal devices which have proved successful over the years under various conditions and with groups of widely varying abilities" (Boyd 1977, p.5). The wording of this phrase is important. Boyd's assertion that these devices have 'proved successful' is grounded only on anecdotal evidence. By failing to ask questions as to why (or when) these approaches are appropriate, Boyd assumes that all groups and all circumstances are interchangeable, and that such changes will have little effect on a conductor. This view is reinforced later, where he states, "with a list of the requirements of a piece of choral music





plainly before him, a choral director should be able to design a rehearsal that will not only prepare the group for a specific performance but also instruct the singers in the art of vocal music” (Boyd 1977, p.5). It is unlikely most choral directors would prepare for a rehearsal by considering only the requirements of the music and neglecting those of the choir. In the preface to *Choral Conducting*, Ericson et al note that, “a discussion of personal and artistic approaches and interpretations has not been included due to the difficulty in translating these dimensions into technical terms” (Ericson, Ohlin, and Spångberg 1976, p.3). While this does acknowledge that such aspects are important to consider, it does seem to suggest that they are less important than the mechanics of conducting. I believe this denies the success of those conductors who are less gesturally adept. There are many choral conductors who have developed reputations for excellence while having techniques which are less than flawless. If we hold the opinion that the road to conducting mastery requires mastery of technical gestures, as suggested to varying degrees in the aforementioned texts, then all ‘great’ conductors should therefore excel in the mechanics of conducting. Yet a review of the conducting styles of any number of ‘great’ conductors does not always support this theory. I believe that is because there are other, equally important, factors which define a good conductor; among the most important is an understanding of group dynamics.

The late Elizabeth Green does not discuss group needs in conducting, either to acknowledge or dismiss the concept, in her book *The Modern Conductor*. *The Grammar of Conducting*, by Max Rudolf, also ignores the musical or extramusical implications of group dynamics. Demaree and Moses’ *The Complete Conductor* appears to consider the choir as a



group; “We believe conductors must be planners and managers, too, and thus we give careful consideration to the administrative aspects of our discipline” (Demaree and Moses 1995, p.xv). Upon further reading, however, it becomes clear that these authors have paid little more than lip service to group concepts. Early in the book they show a disregard for the individual needs of the members of a choir when they say, “there will come unhappy moments when a member of your ensemble will create problems for the other musicians; in such a circumstance, you may need the wisdom to discipline that individual in some appropriate way” (Demaree and Moses 1995, p.4). Finally, despite the size of the book, they devote just one page to, “The Ensemble: A Study in Group Dynamics” (Demaree and Moses 1995, p.99). This is a major flaw in a book which has the subtitle, “A Comprehensive Resource for the Professional Conductor of the Twenty-First Century.”

A common factor in those books mentioned above is an unspoken assumption that all activities occur to serve the music. People are assumed to join choirs (or conduct them) for the sheer aesthetic pleasure of being involved with works of art. This view has long been held as a central pillar of arts education (Gramit 1998), although recent developments in fields such as arts theory and musicology suggest a shift in emphasis. Aesthetic experiences are still seen as important, as few would deny the effect music can have on one’s spirit. But in addition to this come factors such as the individual’s need for social interaction or the need to develop specific skills. This is a shift away from art-as-object to a new art-as-subject approach, where the social implications of music making in a group are considered to be at least as important as any previously held views of the intrinsic value of music itself. In making this aesthetic shift we



must now be aware of the ways in which people interact. Group dynamics and interpersonal relations can have an enormous impact on the way individuals view their experiences in a choir and can also affect their opinions of the music itself. Unfortunately, there are very few places from which musicians can obtain information on group dynamics in a format which applies specifically to their field. While this paper will attempt to provide an overview of the available information, there are other sources as well.

Robert L. Garretson's *Conducting Choral Music* shows signs of taking an approach similar to that of the above authors when he states on the first page, "although the benefits of choral singing are many, the *aesthetic* and *expressive* values of music are considered to be the most important" (Garretson 1988, p.1). However, Garretson takes a broader approach to the functions and values of a choir. In the book's introduction, he includes a significant acknowledgement of group dynamics. Garretson also devotes the entire thirty-eight pages of chapter 7 to "Planning and Organization." He suggests that choral singers will gain the most by being involved "...preferably in groups that are not too large so that effective rapport and communication can be achieved" (Garretson 1988, p.232). Finally, while he has presented his belief earlier about the principle importance of "*aesthetic* and *expressive* values," Garretson shows that there is far more to the choral experience: "There are relatively few [individuals] whose initial interest is entirely *intrinsic* -- that is, whose desire to study music emerges primarily from a love of the music itself" (Garretson 1988, p.234).



In studying choral music and its practical application, I firmly believe that there should be a stronger emphasis on group dynamics and the individual and interpersonal needs of the choir. By understanding the needs of individuals the choral director can evolve from a group leader to a group facilitator, providing the choir with the assistance needed to satisfy individual goals as fully as possible. The study of the choir as a *group* of individuals, and not just as a medium through which the music flows, will allow choral directors and members to get a better understanding of those processes which can allow musicians, as people, to develop over time. To begin to look at the choir in this way, we first must determine those qualities which define a group.

### What is a group?

While a great deal of research has been compiled on group interaction and similar processes, there is no single definition which covers all approaches. According to one view, a group is “two or more people who interact out of mutual interests; a ‘collection of individuals whose existence as a collection is rewarding to the individual’”(Bass 1960, p.39; Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.3). Jewell and Reitz go on to narrow the definition of a group as being, “a relatively small collection of individuals whose members interact with one another on the basis of shared goals, interests, needs, or ideologies. A group may be assigned or contrived (deliberately created to accomplish some task) or it may be formed more spontaneously out of some mutual attraction of the members” (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.10). Attempting a more all-encompassing approach, Alcock et al summarise the definition of ‘group’ as follows:





*A group involves two or more people, who are aware of each other, who both influence and are influenced by one another, who are engaged in an ongoing and relatively stable relationship, who share common goals, and who view themselves as belonging to a group* (Alcock, Carment, and Sadava 1991, p.499).

While each of these definitions differs in its attempt to be comprehensive, they all share similar concepts on which the details are based. For our purposes, however, the definition must be further refined to indicate those unique characteristics which demarcate the *small* group. According to Crosbie, a small group is "...a collection of people who meet more or less regularly in face-to-face interaction, who possess a common identity or exclusiveness of purpose, and who share a set of standards governing their activities" (Crosbie 1975, p.2). This gives a relatively clear indication of those qualities which define a group but the characteristics which make for a *small* group need further explanation. In research on management groups and other related action-oriented bodies, it is generally agreed that small groups consist of 2-5 members, middle-sized groups have 5-12 members, and large groups have more than twelve members (Dailey 1995, p.6/14-15). In the context of traditional choral music these limits may seem quite low, but there are recognisable group size effects which occur regardless of the purpose of the group. In other words, these effects will be similar whether the group in question is a choir, a board of directors, or a group of outdoor adventurers.

In this work, a small choir will be considered the same as a small or medium-sized group as indicated by the above definitions, that is, any group consisting of four to twelve singers. Groups of two or three (duos or trios), while still very much groups, are too small to legitimately be considered *choirs* according to current musical thinking. As well, larger groups are not



included in this discussion due to the extra complications generated by their ‘compound group’ nature: “A group is usually small, seldom exceeding twenty in number. A larger number is likely to split into smaller groups of individuals who share more with each other than with other members” (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.3-4). As already indicated, guidelines exist for understanding the effects of group size which label groups of 12 or more members as ‘large’. The following helps shed some light on group size effects and characteristics.

1. Middle-sized groups (5-12 members) tend to make more accurate decisions than groups outside that size range.
2. Small groups (2-5 members) are better able to achieve consensus than large groups.
3. Larger groups (11 or more members) generate more ideas, but as size increases beyond 20 members, the number of ideas relative to the number of members decreases.
4. Groups of 4-5 members foster greater member satisfaction than middle-sized or large groups.
5. Very small groups (2-3 members) can make members very anxious about their high performance visibility (Dailey 1995, p.6/14-15).

Because of their very nature choirs are broken down into sections; thus the choral environment poses some additional difficulties when trying to determine group size effects. Large choirs act as compound groups, that is, groups within a group. Thus, while a 40-voice SATB choir will function as a large group according to the above models, it will also exhibit some characteristics of a 10-voice choir (assuming four 10-voice sections), and will occasionally act as a four voice unit (S-A-T-B). The director of such a choir may find it difficult to meet the



needs of the membership on a consistent basis, as it is unlikely that the choral structure can be tailored to small, medium, and large choir needs simultaneously. However, the current discussion should provide members of such large choirs a starting point from which to develop an understanding of the complex group interactions of such ensembles.

### Why do people join choirs?

While the details may vary greatly from one situation to another, there is one basic reason why people join choirs: the satisfaction of needs. People choose their actions to maximise the benefit in doing a particular activity.<sup>1</sup> If the activity is not seen as being as efficient a means of achieving the goal when compared to a second activity, the individual will take the second, more efficient, route.

Researchers tend to agree that the satisfaction of needs is a driving reason behind group involvement. They do not, however, completely agree as to the list of needs which may be satisfied. For example, Jewell and Reitz suggest people join groups for reasons of, “Security; Affiliation; Esteem; Power; and Goal Accomplishment” (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.8-9). Dailey, on the other hand, lists the following as “Factors Causing Group Formation”:

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<sup>1</sup> This is known as economic efficiency, which Lumsden defines as the application of the least possible resources in order to generate those outcomes which satisfy the individual’s wants “as fully as possible.” In other words, economic efficiency is getting the most for the least. (Lumsden 1995, p.1/6)



1. Interpersonal attraction
  - a. Proximity
  - b. Physical attraction
  - c. Attitude similarity
  - d. Economic and social similarity
  - e. Race and gender similarity
  - f. Perceived ability of others
2. Activities of the group
3. Goals of the group (Dailey 1995, p.6/5).

For our purposes, the needs which cause people to join a choir can be chosen from among the following:

1. Social interaction
2. Association
3. Short term task refinement
4. Long term task refinement
5. Satisfaction of external/extramusical requirements

The need for social interaction appears in such forms as physical attraction (perhaps to find a mate) or the need to belong. Association can be based on the perceived ability of others, their status, attitude similarity, or economic, social, racial, or gender similarities. Short term task refinement may include the performance of a particular work or in a particular venue, while long term task refinement could take the form of achieving critical success or personal mastery of the voice. Finally, external or extramusical requirements take many forms, such as course requirements, peer pressure, family expectations, or holding a paying position.





The above needs are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is probable that the opportunity to satisfy multiple needs is regarded favourably by the individual. Remember, if the partial satisfaction of multiple needs is considered to provide more benefit than the total satisfaction of a single need, the individual will choose the situation in which multiple needs are being addressed. This will prove to be an important point, as the ability to cater to multiple needs provides the choral director with an opportunity to maintain a diverse, satisfied membership in the choir. By the same token, the choral director's needs do not have to be the same as those of the members, as long as the path to achieving satisfaction is compatible with the largest number of possible goals.

#### How can these needs be satisfied?

The satisfaction of needs in a choral setting depends on several factors. The size of the group plays a large part, as has been discussed. Group dynamics can also be affected by the relative homogeneity/heterogeneity of members' traits: "homogeneous groups have members with similar qualities in several areas (values, work experience, intelligence, gender and education). Heterogeneous groups have members who differ in given characteristics" (Dailey 1995, p.6/6). The level of homogeneity can have a significant impact on group cohesiveness, or the level of belonging felt by members. Other factors which will affect the satisfaction of needs include communication structures, levels of control and conformity, leadership functions and power structures, performance and evaluation, and rewards. We will now look at these factors in detail.

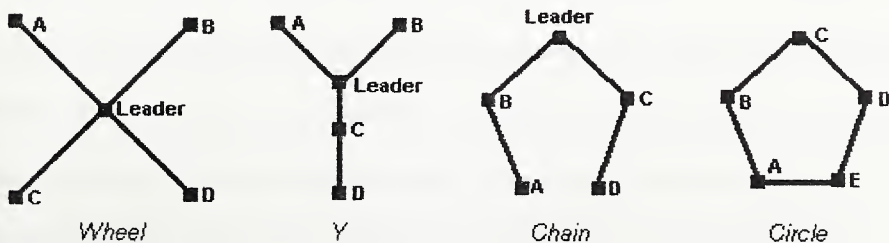


## Communication within the group

Group communication varies considerably with both size and characteristics of group composition, and has a profound effect on decision making structures and techniques. Indeed, Crosbie has shown a close link between communication structures and power and leadership structures, which becomes clear when one considers the evidence (Crosbie 1975, p.258-262, 267). According to Hare, the two extremes of communication structures are the “wheel” and the “circle”, with the “Y” and “chain” in between [see Figure 1]. He describes these structures as follows:

Proximity in the communication network tends to increase intermember attraction. However, if there is no opportunity for “feedback” between members who are close to each other, hostility may appear and efficiency in problem-solving declines. In a comparison of five-man groups in the circle, chain, Y, and wheel networks, Leavitt found that the circle, at one extreme, was active, leaderless, unorganized, erratic, and yet enjoyed by its members. The wheel, at the other extreme, was less active, had a distinct leader, was organized, less erratic, and yet unsatisfying to most of its members (Hare 1962, p.290).

Figure 1: Communication Structures





It is necessary to point out that most choirs are built on a “wheel” communication structure, with rare glimpses of a “Y” structure (for example, when a director only speaks directly to section leaders). Each of the spokes of the wheel can be of varying lengths, largely due to power relations, but fundamentally all communication goes through a central hub, the director. The “circle” format is quite rare, but there is no reason why it could not be successfully employed in a small choir setting. There are some choral groups using this format, including Chanticleer, the King’s Singers, and the Exaudi Chamber Choir (Cuba). As with the “wheel” format, certain members may take a more or less active role depending on relative levels of power, but use of the “circle” communication structure precludes the adoption of a centre of authority. The aforementioned ensembles use a distributed power system to make decisions, provide feedback, and give leadership in performances, yet all in different ways. The King’s Singers use no large physical gestures in specifying tempo, dynamics and the like. Chanticleer has certain members who share the task of leading the ensemble. Exaudi has one member who conducts from one end of the choir, although only at moments of transition; this is more of a “chain” structure than a true “circle”.

These structures do not necessarily remain fixed in all situations. For example, a choir may choose a “circle” for rehearsals and performances, but use a “wheel” or “Y” in order to maintain an orderly, effective administration. As a guideline, Dailey notes, “In general, simple structures with high delegation characterise many of the most effectively managed organisations” (Dailey 1995, p.9/5). Further, it is important to consider all forms of communication, not just verbal interaction. As any conductor knows, there may be a great deal



of non-verbal communication required to interact effectively with a choir, especially hand/arm gestures and facial gestures. Several studies have shown that in cases where “there appears to be a contradiction between what is conveyed by words and what is conveyed by the face, the face is usually considered to be a more accurate guide to the *meaning* of what was said” (Alcock, Carment, and Sadava 1991, p.440). Finally, one must recognise that any changes in communication structures or functions will not take place overnight. “...the development of a group requires time and communication” (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.27).

### Cohesiveness within the group

Cohesiveness refers to the attraction of *members* to a group as a whole and to each other (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.25; Nixon 1979, p.76). Leon Festinger referred to cohesiveness as, “the resultant of all the forces acting on the members to remain in the group” (Festinger 1950, p.274). Group cohesiveness is generally considered to be a positive attribute in group work, although there are some indications that this is not always the case. According to Nixon, “laboratory studies have shown that more cohesive groups perform at only slightly higher levels than, or the same levels as, less cohesive ones, while field and field-experimental studies have shown a more marked superiority in goal attainment of more cohesive groups over less cohesive ones” (Nixon 1979, p.80). The reason for this is that members of cohesive groups tend to perform at a similar level, although it is the group norms<sup>2</sup> which will dictate whether this is consistently high or low performance. “Cohesiveness reinforces the group’s goals and norms.

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<sup>2</sup> “Norms are the group’s standards for members’ behaviour” (Dailey 1995, p.6/9).





We would expect, then, to find cohesive groups among the best and the poorest performers in a given situation with other groups muddling along in the middle. And this expectation is usually borne out” (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.27). Thus it is possible for a group to become too cohesive (see “Control, Conformity & Deviance” below). For a choir, cohesiveness can work on two distinct, yet interrelated, levels.<sup>3</sup> First, a choir strives to function as a unified group when performing, looking for compatible uses of tuning, timbre, diction etc.. As a secondary goal, the choir tries to achieve cohesiveness on a social level, whether between songs in rehearsal, during breaks, or in independent social settings. Choral directors frequently focus only on the first of these goals, leaving social cohesiveness to chance or limiting it to short periods of time. This is unfortunate, as development of group norms occurs in all group interaction, and both technical and social achievements intertwine, influencing one another.

### Control, Conformity & Deviance

Control will be most effective, regardless of group structure, when members know what is expected of them and know the results of their performance. This information must be based on modifiable behaviours and not on personality factors, which are unlikely to be changeable. Knowing this, there are times when control becomes a function of the entire group instead of a single leader. The behaviour of the group in these situations warrants attention.

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<sup>3</sup> Jewell and Reitz refer to these as “task-relevant and task-irrelevant matters” (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.25).



If we observe the functioning of small groups in reaching a decision, we can see that any primary group places numerous limits on the individualistic behavior of its members. Deviant behavior is policed by the group itself, no less than by external authority of a superior (Maier and Hayes 1967, p.197).

I have suggested that there must be a certain level of cohesiveness for a group to function effectively. However, it is entirely possible to develop a group which is too cohesive and which generates an overly rigid set of norms within which all members are expected to function. This is an extreme example of *conformity*. Crosbie defines conformity as, “behavior in accordance with the standards and beliefs (including norms) or a group” (Crosbie 1975, p.431). This definition suggests that conformity need not be considered a positive or negative force within the group. Indeed, Nixon states that conformity, “makes possible the existence of social order in groups and reinforces group structural effects” (Nixon 1979, p.117). If conformity is seen as having the potential to be a positive force, then surely deviance is its opposite, a negative, as it will disrupt social order in groups and throw doubt on group norms. Yet this is not the case; deviance, like conformity, is neither inherently a positive nor a negative. In some groups, deviance is even encouraged to help push the group beyond its current paradigm, while other groups will permit deviance only as an excuse to exercise control and demonstrate the effectiveness of current group norms. Extremes of this can be seen in documented cases of “groupthink” (Janis 1972). Groupthink occurs when the pressure to conform to group standards outweighs the pressure to find innovative approaches to problems.



...the more cohesive the group and the more relevant the issue to the goals of the group, the greater is the inclination of the members to reject a nonconformist. Just as the members insulate themselves from outside critics who threaten to disrupt the unity and esprit de corps of their group, they take steps, often without being aware of it, to counteract the disruptive influence of inside critics who are attacking the group's norms (Janis 1972, p.5).

Regarding the likelihood of groupthink occurring:

The more amiability and esprit de corps among the members of a policy-making in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanizing actions directed against out-groups (Janis 1972, p.13).

As long as it does not reach the level of groupthink, however, conformity is one of the essential elements of group dynamics. Perhaps Jewell and Reitz best summarise the functions of cohesiveness, conformity, and control:

Within groups, conformity to group norms obviously results in substantial similarity of expressed values, opinions, and behaviors. Such conformity is very useful to a group. It helps the group accomplish goals, helps it maintain itself as a group, serves as a means for developing validity or "reality" for member opinions, and helps members to define their relationships to their social environment. Thus groups usually exert strong pressures on members to conform. The norms around which these pressures center are what give the group its identity. Without some degree of conformity, the whole idea of group cohesiveness makes little sense. And, as we have seen, without some degree of group cohesiveness, there is no group (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.57).



## Leadership & Power

Leadership is one of the most studied, yet least understood, areas of sociology and its related disciplines. Researchers have developed models of leadership based on personality traits and behaviours, neither of which have withstood rigorous examination. While there is a current emphasis on situational leadership, there is still a lack of understanding of those characteristics which might allow one to choose the next ‘great’ leader. In fact, most sociologists would tend to argue that such an approach will never be possible. For even a summary understanding of leadership, however, one must begin with a definition of power. Dailey defines power as, “the *capacity* to pursue a course of action of your own choice” (Dailey 1995, p.7/3). While power cannot exist outside the context of a human relationship, this capacity does not need to be exercised in order for a power relationship to exist. There are several possible sources of interpersonal power:

<i>Source</i>	<i>Example</i>
Reward	A director providing a chorister with a favourable review as part of a formal evaluation
Coercive	One member suggesting to others that, despite auditions, an upcoming solo is ‘theirs’
Legitimate	A director unilaterally assigning section leads
Referent	A member behaving in the manner of a well-respected former member
Expert	A member who has extensive singing/directing experience (adapted from Dailey 1995, p.7/3).





Not all of these sources of power accompany the title of manager or director, which can account for some choirs which have one person appointed as director, but another member who internally is considered the ‘real’ leader. There are also examples of choirs who have various members fulfilling different leadership roles simultaneously. There is no rule which states that a group must have only one leader for all circumstances.

Having looked into the power structures which can account for various forms of leadership, we should now move on to the roles of a leader. There are several opinions which deserve attention. “A group leader assimilates each individual’s contribution to the communicative experience by clarifying alternatives and their consequences, by analysing factors that enter into choice, and by relating information elements to the group objectives and to available resources” (Penland and Fine 1974, p.4). According to Osborn, one of the primary roles of leadership is to ensure that imagination is used toward creative ends and not just to predict outcomes. Referring to a corporate setting, Osborn writes:

One of the needs of big business is to bring up the creative power of second-line executives. They sit in plenty of conferences, but they are too often tempted to use their imaginations merely to anticipate how their associates will react. Such anti-creative tendencies can often be overcome by active encouragement on the part of those at the top (Osborn 1963, p.377).

The musical parallel to this is the encouragement of innovative approaches to the many tasks a choir performs, be they musical, administrative, etc.. Directors should take care to ensure they receive plentiful, honest feedback from the choir, not just those responses the choir



assumes the director would most like to hear. By creating democratic lines of communication within the group, the leader creates a means by which the choir can *develop the leader* to suit *their* needs, both as a group and as individuals.

The democratic concept of leadership provides that business organizations are social as well as economic institutions, with a complex variety of goals being sought simultaneously. In this view, leadership is required not just to project objective...goals downward, but also to help the group attain subjective goals which arise from the personal and social needs of the members. Needs for effective leadership are generated within the workgroup itself (Maier and Hayes 1967, p.13).

There are times, however, when the type of leadership must be varied according to the situation. Accordingly:

Autocratic leadership leads to greater productivity in stressful situations, while democratic leadership produces greater productivity in non-stressful circumstances. Thus no one leadership style is likely to be effective in all situations (Alcock, Carment, and Sadava 1991, p.514).

Leaders must be flexible in order to adapt to ever changing situations. Many individual attributes can help or hinder the effectiveness of a leader. However radical it may seem, the role of a leader in choral music can perhaps be summarised as follows: “The best leader is the one that the group no longer needs” (Penland and Fine 1974, p.132).



## Performance and Evaluation

Referring to the previous sections, it might appear as though choirs had little chance of achieving even the most modest of goals. Clearly this is not so. “Powerful as influence processes in groups are, they do not immobilize the achievement of satisfactory performance” (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.66). There are several reasons for this. First, groups can develop high-performance or low-performance norms which, if applied, will result in high- or low-performance output. In this case, conformity to the group’s norms can be a very positive outcome. Second, individual task familiarity can greatly affect performance, especially when the individual is at a significantly higher or lower level than the rest of the group. Finally, individual factors may have a more significant effect on task performance than do group factors, in which case those group effects mentioned above may function at such a low level as to be insignificant. Added to these complications is the issue of performance appraisal: how does one evaluate group success?

Group “success” is a nebulous quality, hard to define and harder yet to measure. Group development takes place in some directions and not in others; while the group is a successful experience for some members and a negative one for others. Leadership is a satisfying function at one moment and frustrating a moment later (Penland and Fine 1974, p.117).

While evaluation is indeed difficult, it is the only way to measure the satisfaction of both the individual members and the group as an organic whole. Regarding evaluation, Penland and Fine go on to say:



As with any other group process, evaluation can move the group toward greater productivity and firmer unity, or it can be the process that intensifies member frustration and hastens group disintegration. Evaluation is the process of measuring group activity in terms of group and member objectives. The constructive evaluation that results in constructive planning is based on an understanding of group dynamics and the way in which those dynamics are a manifestation of need fulfilment by group members (Penland and Fine 1974, p.117).

To avoid the pitfalls of the evaluation process it is important to develop a system by which complete, accurate, and timely information can be distributed to the group members. While many choir directors collect questionnaires and provide summarised information to their choirs, research suggests that such unidirectional evaluation, while of use in some arenas, can be ineffective for creative groups (Dailey 1995, p.4/8). As a way of addressing these concerns, Dailey suggests the adoption of interactive goal setting and frequent and accurate feedback. The methodology proposed is known as “management by objectives” (MBO), which is a seven-step process which feeds back into itself. The steps are as follows:

1. ANALYSE the mix of people, tasks, work methods and external demands
  2. PLAN goals, strategy, communication, and training
  3. DEFINE the members’ tasks in terms of content, authority, and responsibility
  4. ARTICULATE goal difficulty, clarity, type of feedback
  5. AGREE (mutually) about goals, methods, performance measurement, and timeframe
  6. INFORMALLY review goal achievement, methods, and probable rewards, and REVISE goals and methods if necessary
  7. FORMALLY review goal achievement and rewards
- (adapted from Dailey 1995, p.4/10)





When using the above guidelines one must be sure that there is an equal emphasis on both personal and organisational goals. This will ensure that group development occurs at a compatible rate to individual growth, which in turn will aid in the setting of challenging goals during the next cycle of the process.

Finally, there is the question of whether groups will always outperform individuals. While we are most often confronted with the notion of groups being more effective than individuals, in many instances this is not always the case. Research has shown that members of a group will often perform at a less than optimal level when working with others on a group task. As the number of members increases, the effort put forth by each decreases: This phenomenon is known as “social loafing” (Alcock, Carment, and Sadava 1991, p.203). Current thoughts on the subject suggest that social loafing occurs when individual members’ efforts cannot be evaluated with any degree of accuracy, either by the leader or the members themselves. Thus, the choral member, and the choral leader, must always be on the lookout for signs which indicate social loafing is taking place in order to get the maximum possible effort from all members.

### Rewards & Status

Rewards provided to members can help or hinder the establishment of an effective group. “Shared reward systems, those in which members share more or less equally in the fruit of the group’s labors, tend to foster cooperation and cohesiveness. [...] Differential reward systems



which foster intragroup competition work to the detriment of group cohesiveness...” (Jewell and Reitz 1981, p.28). Thus care should be taken to ensure the reward system is not competitive if group cohesiveness is a primary goal. The negative aspects of intragroup competition can be minimised if most rewards are assigned on a group basis, with individual rewards being de-emphasised if not eliminated.

There are two basic types of rewards: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic rewards are those rewards generated in performing the task itself, such as increased self esteem, feelings of affiliation and belonging, security, and status. Extrinsic rewards are non-regular rewards given to a member by the organisation, and include direct compensation (cash, merchandise, concert tickets), indirect compensation (section leads receiving time off) which reflects status, and non-financial rewards (impressive titles, special recognition). Most choirs are geared towards intrinsic rewards, and, whether by chance or design, this is a positive attribute. Research has shown that, “intrinsic rewards are more important than extrinsic rewards in influencing motivation and performance” (Dailey 1995, p.4/13). Further, there is speculation that rewards for individuals which are generated by the group are considered more important than those distributed by an external body, such as a director.



## Summary and Implications

The view of music as a timeless form divorced from everyday human concerns is not irrelevant; but to imply that local musical practitioners move, or ought to move, in some high rarefied atmosphere would be a laughable travesty. Enthusiastic about music they certainly are, but at the same time their musical activities are embedded in a whole series of other interests and commitments. (Finnegan 1989, p.328).

Music making is more than just an aesthetic experience. While musicians have traditionally been assumed to do what they do purely for the love of music, this view is no longer held to be a universal truth. There are many reasons why people choose to make music, usually as a group, including social interaction, association, short and long term task refinement, and a variety of external or extramusical reasons. These reasons, or needs, interact simultaneously and continuously and are a constant factor in group interaction of all forms.

Functioning in a group is a skill which must be learned. As with many other skills, this learning can be most effectively facilitated by the use of a well structured program which systematically develops awareness of, and effectiveness in, the fundamentals of group work. The details of such a program would have to be tailored to specific situations, but all musicians could learn the basics of such an approach by simply being made aware that these group processes are occurring. For those pursuing formal music education, group dynamics must be learned alongside more traditional aspects of music education such as interpretation, performance techniques, and theoretical elements if the musical ensemble is to function



consistently as an organic unit.

While all people are different, they share the same underlying reason for undertaking any task: the satisfaction of needs. These needs can be manifested in many different ways, each specific to the situation but always aimed toward satisfying the needs listed above. Finnegan points out a number of ways in which this occurs:

The choirs, the orchestras, the small and large bands, the many clubs, and the accepted musical occasions all provide settings in which people can act in many different and quite down-to-earth ways -- finding opportunities, for example, to make friends or enemies; meet potential mates; keep up with the Joneses; escape from domestic pressures one evening a week; assert themselves, throw their weight around, or impress their peers; make useful business or social contacts; enjoy the pleasures of working in a co-operative venture or of agitating for changes; enter competitions; please their families, peers, teachers, colleagues or friends; get acclamation from those whom they admire; earn money or the appearance of money; have an evening out with friends... (Finnegan 1989, p.328).

In trying to understand these needs, one must keep in mind that the various needs of different people may be satisfied simultaneously; one person may be satisfying a need for long term task refinement while another in the same ensemble may be satisfying a need for association. It is also quite likely that each of these individuals is satisfying more than one need simultaneously. Rarely do people only satisfy one need when performing a task. With this in mind, a choir director may be able to nurture long term needs in the choir while simultaneously satisfying short term needs such as course requirements. In doing so, the choir will stand a greater chance of remaining a cohesive unit.





Group dynamics are affected by several factors, including communication structures, cohesiveness, control and conformity, types of leadership and power structures, performance and evaluation, and group size. While this paper has focused on choirs with four to twelve members, group dynamics are important in groups of all sizes and types. The implications of the above discussions can be readily applied to symphony orchestras, jazz quintets, and rock bands. Indeed, there is no reason why one should limit the discussion to the performing ensemble, as group dynamics are equally applicable to a budget committee meeting or a faculty softball team.

While this paper may have answered some questions for the reader, it is my hope that the concepts expressed herein have developed further questions and issues. As research into group dynamics and the musical ensemble is quite new, there should be ample opportunities for further investigation.



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